

Presbyterian Church
Basking Ridge
Bernards Township, Somerset County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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Presbyterian Church
Basking Ridge
Bernards Township, Somerset County, New Jersey

Owner: The Trustees of the same

Date of Erection: 1839, enlarged in 1869

Architect:

Builders: William Kirk and Thomas Kirkpatrick
of Essex County

Present Condition: Original, as enlarged and renovated

Number of Stories: One, with gallery and belfry

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone masonry

Exterior walls - brick to eave line, frame
gable portico and belfry

Interior walls - frame partitions and brick
party wall

Chimney - brick

Roof - gable, slate roofing

Historical Data:

The earliest records now in possession being the Trustees' Book entitled "The Book of the Congregation of Bernardstown, A.D. 1763-1815", the date of the origin of this congregation, (first mentioned in the minutes of the Presbyterian Synod of 21 September 1731) has been variously ascribed to 1700-1730 by modern writers(a).

(a) Inscription over the west door:

This Church was rebuilt A.D. 1839 on the site of the former one reared A.D. 1749 where stood the ancient log church erected near the beginning of the last century.

In 1728, John Budd an Elder of the Presbyterian Church at Philadelphia writing to his agent at Basking Ridge mentions a 100 acre tract there which he had lately donated "for the use of a meeting house" there. That tract was apparently the original parsonage farm. It is of record, however, that by deed of 8 February 1731, John Ayers conveyed to Obadiah Ayers, Mordecai McKenne, James Pitney, George Park, Samuel Rolfe, Daniel Morrice and Thomas Riggs one and one-half acres "On or near the middle of which now stands a house built and intended for the exercising of religious worship in". The Rev. John Cross, who became a member of the Synod of Philadelphia in 1732, is said certainly to have preached at Basking Ridge from that year to 1741, the first known minister there.

During the term of the third minister, the Rev. Joseph Lamb, 1744-1749, the original log meeting house was replaced by the frame one, 35 feet by 55 feet, of which a seating plan showing 52 sittings on the ground floor and 26 in the gallery is found in the Trustees' Book mentioned first above. In 1803 this building was enlarged to allow 28 more pews on the ground floor and 12 more in the gallery, a total of 118 pews(b) and it served until sold and demolished in 1839.

The following extracts from the Trustees' Book of 1826-1869 form the basis for any authentic account of the erection of the present structure, a notable example of meeting house rendered in the Greek Revival style.

Jan. 28, 1839 - At a meeting of the Presbyterian congregation it was resolved unanimously that we rebuild the meeting house at Basking Ridge;

- (b) The list of pew holders 1769-1776 of Basking Ridge Presbyterian Church has been extracted from the records and published in The Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, V, 97-98; that of 1783-1786 in VI, 106-107; records of Baptisms 1795-1817 in VII, 33 et seq.; and of marriages 1795-1811 in VI, 118. The gravestone inscriptions in the churchyard have been copied and published in Somerset Historical Quarterly, Vol. 1, pp. 123-128 and 214-219.

that it be built of brick; that the following persons be appointed a committee to enter upon their duties immediately, viz. Aaron Hand, John Brees, S. S. Doty, Jacob Collyer & Samuel Adamson; that it be erected on the ground of the old church.

March 14, 1839 - Resolved that the President of Trustees enter into a contract with the firm of William Kirk and Thomas Kirkpatrick to rebuild the church, and resolved to hire one thousand dollars for the purpose of making a payment to same.

March 30, 1839 - Resolved to sell the old church at public vendue on Saturday April 6, 1839.

April 15, 1839 - Resolved that James Simpson be a committee to move the fence and gravestones so that the meeting house can be taken down.

January 18, 1840 - Resolved that the new church be dedicated to Almighty God, Wednesday, February 5, 1840.

August 31, 1840 - Resolved that we give the builders of church three hundred dollars voted by congregation at a previous meeting in remuneration for loss sustained in building church.

September 23, 1867 - Resolved to repair lecture room.

July 18, 1869 - The covering of the Presbyterian Church having been torn off by a severe windstorm on the afternoon of July 17, 1869, a meeting of the Trustees was called on the morning of the 18th. After careful consideration it was decided to cover it with a slate roof.

July 27, 1869 - Resolved to enlarge the church. William N. Corbett, John H. Anderson and Ferdinand Van Dorn were appointed a committee to consult architects and receive plans for same.

November 25, 1869 - Plans for enlarging the church were adopted and William N. Corbett, Augustus Moore and John Guerin appointed the building committee.

The old church bell was rehung in the new church building in 1846; presumably it had been hung there at the time of erection in 1839; the present bell in 1875. A chapel was erected in 1887 to replace the outgrown Lecture and Sabbath School Room. In 1886 a new pipe organ was installed in the church at a cost of more than \$1000, and in 1892 the "audience-room" was given a "thorough renovation" at a cost of some \$2500.

Bibliography:

Rev. John C. Rankin, D.D., Historical Address (1872) reprinted with two supplements and with Notes by the Rev. Oscar M. Voorhees, D. D. (1939) under title "The Presbyterian Church in Basking Ridge, N.J." illustrated, 60 pp.

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Supervising Historian

Approved:

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